

**PUBLIC OPINION SURVEY:  
THE IOWA COURT SYSTEM**

Judicial Coordinating Committee  
Iowa Supreme Court

Fall 1981



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## SECTION I: INTRODUCTION

### Problem Statement

"The Judiciary is the least understood of the three branches of government, yet it does the least to assist the public and the news media in truly understanding the function of the judicial process."<sup>1</sup> Since the turn of the century the responsibility, power, and authority of the courts has expanded at a rapid pace, with the courts becoming perhaps the most powerful and persuasive governmental force in this country.<sup>2</sup> Issues presented to and decided by the courts touch on all parts of the citizens' lives. Despite the importance of these issues and the effect of court decisions on citizens, the public has a very limited understanding and comprehension of the legal system.

The Iowa Supreme Court has addressed the area of court reform in recent years. As part of this ongoing effort, the Judicial Coordinating Committee has set forth public involvement in court improvement as one of four major goals to be pursued in the 1981-83 Iowa Judicial Plan. In response to the problem of public involvement and understanding of the legal system, the court has initiated several efforts to date. A newsletter entitled Iowa's Third Branch has been published for more than one year, with the purpose of informing personnel within the court system of issues, changes, and other relevant matters. In addition, a brochure entitled The Iowa Court System has been distributed recently in limited quantities to the general

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<sup>1</sup>Martin, Giving Light to the People: Public Relations for the Courts, 57 Judicature 190 (1973). This statement was attributed to an Alabama newspaper publisher.

<sup>2</sup>The News Media and the Washington, D.C. Courts: Some Suggestions for Bridging the Communications Gap, A Study Report prepared by the Community Education Committee of the Young Lawyers Section of the District of Columbia Bar Association (1972).

Iowa will be discussed.

This report will not contain in-depth analysis of the survey results or detailed comments requested of respondents in the survey. Any material and analysis collected and performed using these data will be made available to anyone desiring to see it.

## SECTION II: METHODOLOGY

The information included in this report was collected by Iowa Market Research Services, the Commercial Research Division of the Des Moines Register and Tribune Company. This firm was selected as the result of a bidding process conducted by the Judicial Coordinating Committee. Iowa Market Research Services has been conducting telephone surveys for more than thirty-five years. After a careful review of these and other factors reflecting the experience and organizational structure of this firm, the Judicial Coordinating Committee felt quite confident in selecting Iowa Market Research Services to conduct the survey.

Iowa Market Research Services completed a total of 510 telephone interviews; however, the total number of respondents included in the present analysis is 501. Nine interviews were not included in the final report either due to missing information considered necessary for inclusion or due to the sample being drawn to reflect the correct proportion of males and females in Iowa. Telephone interviewing was conducted between April 29 and May 8, 1981 using a total of eighteen interviewers. A minimum of ten percent of all interviews were checked for accuracy; all questionnaires were edited for quality and completeness.

The survey instrument used for the interviews was developed by the staff to the Judicial Coordinating Committee with assistance from the Statistical Analysis Center, State of Iowa. A copy of the survey instrument can be inspected at the office of the Director of Court Planning.

The sample of 501 respondents was drawn from a computer-generated random telephone number listing that includes all exchanges and individual telephone numbers in the state of Iowa. The ratio of men to women in the completed interviews was intended to reflect the adult male/female distribution for the state. The number of males included in the sample drawn was 241 or 48 percent of the total; the number of females included in the sample was 259 or 52 percent.

The data analysis presented in this report is taken from computer print-outs provided by the Statistical Analysis Center of the state of Iowa. Statistical Package for the Social Sciences Computer Software was utilized to report the data. Both frequency distributions for all variables included in the study and crosstabular analysis of selected variables were executed. Complete computer print-outs will be available to anyone desiring to see them. The analysis presented in this report will focus on percentage distributions. Our intent is to report the information in readily understandable form.

### SECTION III: SURVEY RESULTS

#### Nature and Extent of Respondents' Experience with Court

Respondents were asked a series of questions regarding the nature and extent of their experience in the Iowa court system. The question as phrased for the interview will be presented in boldface type, followed by the survey results for that particular question. Explanations and comments will follow the tabular presentation.

The first question asked of respondents is:

**Have you ever been in a courtroom in Iowa?**

Respondents answered as follows: Yes, 54.5% (273); no, 45.5% (228). Thus, slightly more than half the respondents have been in a courtroom in Iowa.

The second question asks:

**How many times have you been in a courtroom in Iowa?**

Respondents answered as follows:

never	46%	(228)
one time	23%	(116)
two times	9%	(45)
three times	5%	(26)
four times	3%	(17)
five times	2%	(10)
six times	3%	(17)
seven times	0	
eight or more times	7%	(35)
don't know	1%	(7)

Next, respondents were asked to indicate their reason for being in court. The question asks:

**For what reason were you in court?**

The list of reasons offered, with respondents' answers, is as follows:

defendant	14%	(39)
plaintiff	11%	(29)
visitor	22%	(59)
juror/served	20%	(55)
juror/not chosen	11%	(30)

law enforcement		
official	2%	( 6)
witness	13%	(36)
attorney	.4%	( 1)
court employee	2%	( 4)
other (specify)	5%	(13)
don't know	.4%	( 1)

Respondents were also asked to indicate the kind of court with which they were involved. The question asks:

**What kind of court was it?**

The responses are as follows:

magistrate/traffic	24%	( 66)
District Court	56%	(154)
Civil, criminal, juvenile, probate		
Court of Appeals	2%	( 5)
Supreme Court	1%	( 3)
Other	9%	( 25)
Don't know	7%	( 20)

Respondents were asked next to indicate the type of case with which they were involved. The question is phrased as follows:

**What kind of case was it?**

The responses to this question are:

Traffic	26%	(72)
Civil (divorce, adoption)	32%	(88)
Criminal	18%	(48)
Juvenile	4%	(11)
Probate (wills, estates, trusts)	1%	( 3)
mixed	4%	(10)
Other	6%	(17)
Don't know	9%	(24)

The final question to be included in this subsection of the report has to do with respondents' court experience and any subsequent attitude change they experienced. The question is stated as follows:

**As a result of your court experience did your attitude about the courts change positively, negatively, or remain about the same?**

The responses to this question are as follows:

Changed positively	11%	( 30)
Changed negatively	14%	( 37)
Remained about the same	72%	(197)
Don't know	3%	( 9)

Respondents who indicated their attitude had changed were asked as a follow-up question to explain why this occurred. The question is:

**If your attitude has changed, could you explain why?**

We shall not attempt to offer a detailed categorization of respondents' answers to this question here. For this and other open-ended questions in the survey, we shall group the responses in broad categories indicating the general nature of the comments. We shall provide to anyone desiring to see them a listing of specific comments by respondents for this and all similar questions.

Among respondents who indicated a positive change in their attitude, approximately 41% stated this change was due to their perception of the organization of the court and the way cases were handled or of the conduct of participants in general in the court proceedings. An additional 26% indicated their change in attitude was due simply to a better understanding of the court. Approximately 19% of those indicating a positive change suggested this was due to the results of the court proceedings. Finally, approximately 15% of those indicating a positive change in attitude suggested this change was due to the demeanor or conduct of the judge. The total number of statements classified as indicating positive change is twenty-seven. Among respondents who indicated a negative change in their attitude about the courts, an equal number suggests this was due to the performance of participants in the proceedings and to the general performance of the system. Thirty-two percent of the respondents in this group suggested the

TABLE 1

RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS ABOUT  
THE COURTS IN IOWA

<u>Statement</u>	<u>RESPONSE</u>		
	<u>True</u>	<u>False</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Everyone accused of a serious crime has the right to be represented in court by a lawyer	98.4% (493)	0.8% (4)	0.8% (4)
The highest court in Iowa has the power to change decisions made by lower courts	81.6% (409)	9.4% (47)	9.0% (45)
In a criminal trial, it is up to the person who is accused of the crime to prove his or her innocence	41.9% (210)	54.5% (273)	3.6% (18)
All judges in Iowa are elected to office	34.5% (173)	51.3% (257)	14.2% (71)
Iowans vote in elections to keep judges in office	57.5% (288)	25.3% (127)	17.2% (86)
Cameras, radio, and television equipment are not allowed in the courtroom	31.1% (156)	57.5% (288)	11.2% (56)
The justice of the peace courts, mayors courts and municipal courts have been abolished in Iowa	30.9% (155)	41.7% (210)	27.1% (136)
A court of appeals has been established in Iowa between the trial courts and the Supreme Court	58.1% (291)	4.8% (24)	37.1% (186)

people do not understand the appointment and retention processes of judges in Iowa.

Statements regarding two relatively recent changes in the Iowa court system produced similar percentages of respondents answering correctly compared with other statements in this series but quite dissimilar percentages of respondents indicating they don't know. Approximately 50% of the respondents were correct regarding both media coverage in the courts (sixth statement) and the establishment of the Court of Appeals; however, approximately 31% were incorrect in suggesting that the statement regarding media coverage was true while approximately 37% of the respondents indicated they just didn't know about the establishment of the Court of Appeals. Both sets of responses indicate that the public's understanding of changes in the court system can be improved.

The seventh statement listed in Table 1 produces responses that lead us to reaffirm this conclusion. Regarding the abolition of justice of the peace courts, mayors courts, and municipal courts, approximately 42% of the respondents are incorrect in their response that the statement is false. As was true regarding the Court of Appeals statement, a significant percentage of respondents indicate that they don't know (27%).

The responses to these eight statements presented in Table 1 should not be surprising given the purpose of conducting this survey. The findings confirm our concern regarding a lack of understanding by the general public of the court system in Iowa. At the same time, we can be encouraged in several cases by the percentage of people that, based on their correct responses, seem to have a reasonably good understanding of some aspects of the court system.

The first three statements listed in Table 1 were also included in the national public opinion survey conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly and White, Inc.<sup>3</sup> Ninety-

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<sup>3</sup>Yankelovich, Skelly and White, Inc., "Highlights of a National Survey of the General Public, Judges, Lawyers, and Community Leaders," in State Courts: A Blueprint for the Future, National Center for State Courts, Publication No. R0038, August 1978.

three percent of the respondents in the national survey agreed with the statement that "everyone accused of a serious crime has the right to be represented in court by a lawyer," compared with greater than 98% of the respondents in the Iowa survey. Regarding the statement that "the highest court in Iowa has the power to change decisions made by lower courts, the responses in the two surveys were virtually identical. Eighty-three percent of the respondents in the national survey believed this statement to be accurate while eighty-two percent of the respondents in the Iowa survey indicated they felt this statement to be true. Finally, the respective results regarding the third statement listed in Table 1 are also quite similar. Regarding the statement that "in a criminal trial, it is up to the person who is accused of the crime to prove his or her innocence," thirty-seven percent of the respondents in the national survey believed this to be true while forty-two percent of the respondents in the Iowa survey indicated they felt this was true. Fifty-six percent and fifty-five percent respectively felt this statement was false in the national and Iowa surveys. At least for these three statements, then, the two surveys have produced extremely similar percentage distributions. A similar comparison will be made following the presentation of Table 2.

Fifteen statements, with the corresponding responses of respondents, are listed in Table 2 and 2A. For each statement listed, we shall offer brief comments regarding the percentage distributions and indicate the mean for each. We shall also compare these results with those in the national survey for those statements included in both. Table 2 will include statements dealing with numerous topics; Table 2A will include statements dealing exclusively with media-related issues.

The first statement listed in Table 2 is:

**Courts help to decrease the amount of crime.**

If we combine the strongly disagree and disagree columns and the agree and strongly agree columns, we find that approximately 56% of the respondents disagree with this

TABLE 2

RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS ABOUT ISSUES AND  
PROBLEMS IN THE IOWA COURT SYSTEM

RESPONSE

<u>Statement</u>	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Courts help to decrease the amount of crime	6.8% (34)	49.3% (247)	38.9% (195)	2.0% (10)	3.0% (15)
Courts treat blacks and whites alike	2.4% (12)	28.7% (144)	55.1% (276)	2.0% (10)	11.8% (59)
Court buildings are in poor condition	0.4% (2)	46.9% (235)	32.7% (164)	2.0% (10)	18.0% (90)
Lawyers' fees are too expensive	0.6% (3)	13.0% (65)	58.7% (294)	18.0% (190)	9.8% (49)
Judges give different sentences to those with the same offense and background	1.2% (6)	20.6% (103)	55.5% (278)	7.8% (39)	15.0% (75)
Judges allow bail to those previously convic- ted of a serious crime	1.0% (5)	15.2% (76)	57.9% (290)	6.0% (30)	20.0% (100)
Courts do not have enough judges to handle the work- load	0.4% (2)	15.6% (78)	59.9% (300)	9.0% (45)	15.2% (76)
Long delays occur before a civil case comes to trial	--	3.8% (19)	71.3% (357)	15.6% (78)	9.4% (47)
Lawyers are more inter- ested in obtaining their fees than serving their clients	1.6% (8)	42.7% (214)	34.9% (175)	7.0% (35)	13.8% (69)
Courts do not treat rich and poor people alike	1.2% (6)	26.1% (131)	49.9% (250)	12.4% (62)	10.4% (52)
Judges show little inter- est in peoples' problems	1.0% (5)	51.7% (259)	27.1% (136)	2.0% (10)	18.2% (91)

TABLE 2A

RESPONSES TO STATEMENTS ABOUT MEDIA  
RELATED ISSUES IN THE IOWA COURT SYSTEM

<u>Statement</u>	RESPONSE				
	<u>Strongly Disagree</u>	<u>Disagree</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
Television and news- papers should play an important role in in- forming the public about the courts	1.2% (6)	9.6% (48)	78.2% (392)	7.8% (39)	3.2% (16)
Reporters should not be allowed to publish or broadcast information which might affect the outcome of a trial	1.2% (6)	8.4% (42)	73.7% (369)	13.8% (69)	3.0% (15)
Television cameras should be allowed in the court- room	4.2% (21)	46.3% (232)	36.3% (182)	3.4% (17)	9.8% (49)
Newspaper reporters should be allowed to take pictures at trial	3.6% (18)	53.7% (269)	35.5% (178)	2.0% (10)	5.2% (26)

statement to some extent while approximately 41% agree. The mean response (with the standard deviation in parentheses) for this statement is 2.37 (0.65). Although the majority of respondents disagree with this statement, a relatively large number of respondents indicate some level of agreement.

If we combine columns for the second statement listed,

**Courts treat blacks and whites alike,**

we find that approximately 31% express some disagreement while approximately 57% express some agreement. The mean for this statement is 2.64 (0.57). A sizeable percentage of respondents also indicated they didn't know.

Regarding the statement

**court buildings are in poor condition,**

almost half the respondents, or 47%, expressed some disagreement with this. The percentage indicating some level of agreement is thirty-five. The mean for this statement is 2.44 (0.55). Once again, a sizeable number of respondents indicated they didn't know (18%).

The statement that elicited the largest number of "strongly agree" responses involves lawyers' fees. Some level of agreement was expressed by 77% of the respondents regarding the statement

**lawyers' fees are too expensive.**

Only 14% indicated some level of disagreement. The mean for this statement is 3.04 (0.61). The next three statements in Table 2 have quite similar percentage distributions, when columns are combined, and means. Regarding the statement,

**judges give different sentences to those with  
the same offense and background,**

approximately 22% expressed some disagreement while approximately 63% expressed some agreement. The mean for this statement is 2.82 (0.60). Regarding the statement,

**judges allow bail to those previously convicted  
of a serious crime,**

the percentage of respondents indicating some level of disagreement was approximately 16%, with approximately 64% indicating some level of agreement. The mean for this statement is 2.86 (0.54). Regarding the statement,

**courts do not have enough judges to handle the workload,**

approximately 16% expressed some disagreement while approximately 69% expressed some agreement. The mean for this statement is 2.91 (0.55). The percentage of respondents indicating they don't know for these three statements are 15%, 20%, and 15% respectively.

One of three statements with the percentage of respondents in some agreement exceeding 85% is the next statement listed in Table 2. The statement is,

**long delays occur before a civil case comes to trial.**

Approximately 87% of the respondents indicated some level of agreement with this statement, while only 4% indicated some level of disagreement. This is clearly the lowest percentage of respondents indicating some disagreement among all statements. We remind the reader of the combined responses for the statement immediately preceding this one, involving a shortage of judges. Approximately 70% of the respondents agreed that courts do not have enough judges to handle the workload.

The ninth statement listed in Table 2 involves lawyers and their interest in fees versus serving their clients. Approximately 44% disagreed at some level that

**lawyers are more interested in obtaining their  
fees than serving their clients.**

Approximately 42% agreed with this, with 14% indicating they didn't know. The mean for this statement is 2.55 (0.67).

Approximately 62% of the respondents agreed at some level with the statement,

**courts do not treat rich and poor people alike.**

Approximately 27% of the respondents expressed some level of disagreement. Stated positively, approximately 27% of the respondents feel rich and poor people are treated alike while 62% of the respondents feel rich and poor people are not treated alike. The mean for this statement is 2.82 (0.67).

The final statement listed in Table 2 is,

**judges show little interest in peoples' problems.**

Approximately 53% of the respondents disagreed to some extent with this statement while approximately 29% expressed some level of agreement. The mean for this statement is 2.37 (0.55).

Turning to the media-related statements listed in Table 2A, we find a quite large percentage of respondents expressing some level of agreement with the first two statements listed with a minority of respondents indicating some agreement with the last two statements listed here. The first statement is,

**television and newspapers should play an important  
role in informing the public about the courts.**

Approximately 86% of the respondents indicated some level of agreement, while approximately 11% expressed some level of disagreement. The mean for this statement is 2.96 (0.48). This agreement is not surprising in light of the findings to be reported in Table 3. These involve the source of respondents' information about the court system.

The second statement listed in Table 2A is,

**reporters should not be allowed to publish or  
broadcast information which might affect the  
outcome of a trial.**

Approximately 88% of the respondents indicate some level of agreement with this statement. Approximately 10% express some level of disagreement with this statement. The mean for this statement is 3.03 (0.53). This statement elicited the

largest percentage of respondents expressing some level of agreement among all fifteen statements listed in Tables 2 and 2A; as indicated above, four statements had a combined percentage of respondents expressing some level of agreement that was greater than eighty-five.

At least half the respondents expressed some level of disagreement with the last two statements listed in Table 2A. Regarding the statement,

**television cameras should be allowed in the courtroom,**

approximately 51% of the respondents indicated some level of disagreement; approximately 40% expressed some level of agreement. Finally, regarding the statement,

**newspaper reporters should be allowed to take pictures at trials,**

approximately 57% of the respondents expressed some level of disagreement while approximately 38% expressed some level of agreement. The respective means and standard deviations (in parentheses) for these two statements are 2.43 (0.64) and 2.38 (0.60) respectively.

Although several of the issues included in these fifteen statements were also included in the national public opinion survey conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly and White, Inc., the phrasing of the statement or presentation of the issue is, in most cases, different. For instance, the Iowa survey includes the statement "courts help to decrease the amount of crime" with respondents asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement. In the national survey, respondents were asked to rank the seriousness of various problems on a nine point scale. In this case, the problem statement was: "courts that do not help decrease the amount of crime." A total of 43% of the respondents in the national survey indicated they felt this was a serious problem that occurs often (point nine on the nine point scale). As reported above for Iowa, a total of 56% of the respondents indicated they disagreed to some extent with

the statement as presented to them. Because of this difference in framing or presenting the issues, we shall not attempt to analyze the respective findings here. Rather, we shall simply present the national findings as they were reported and indicate which statement in Tables 2 or 2A corresponds to these findings.

This difference applies to the second statement listed in Table 2 as well. While respondents in the Iowa survey were asked to respond to a statement, respondents in the national survey were asked to indicate how serious a problem "courts that do not treat blacks as well as they treat whites" is. Nineteen percent indicated that this was a serious problem that occurs often. A total of 31% of the respondents in the Iowa survey indicated they disagreed to some degree with the statement that courts treat blacks and whites alike.

The sixth, seventh, tenth and eleventh statements in Table 2 also have corresponding problem statements in the national survey. Regarding the statement that "judges allow bail to those previously convicted of a serious crime" in the Iowa survey, thirty-seven percent of the respondents in the national survey indicated that "courts that grant bail to those previously convicted of a serious crime" was a serious problem that occurs often. Regarding the statement in the Iowa survey that "courts do not have enough judges to handle the workload," thirty-nine percent of the respondents in the national survey indicated that "not enough judges to handle the work" was a serious problem that occurs often. The tenth statement in the Iowa survey regarding the treatment of rich and poor has a corresponding problem statement in the national survey which twenty-five percent of the respondents felt was a serious problem that occurs often; the problem statement is, "courts that do not treat the poor as well as they treat the affluent." The final statement in Table 2 regarding judges' interest in peoples' problems has a corresponding problem statement in the national survey which fifteen percent of the respondents felt was a serious problem that occurs often. The problem statement was: "Judges who show

little interest in peoples' problems."

The media-related statements presented in Table 2A are quite similar in phrasing and presentation to statements included in the national survey. The statement in the national survey corresponding to the first statement in Table 2A is, "Media should play an important role in showing how court system really works." Eighty-six percent of the respondents in the Iowa survey either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement as presented; seventy percent of the respondents in the national survey either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with the statement as presented.

The statement in the national survey corresponding to the second statement in Table 2A is, "reporters should be prohibited from publishing/broadcasting information which might affect fair trial." Sixty-nine percent of the respondents in the national survey either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with this statement. In the Iowa survey, eighty-eight percent either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement as presented.

The statement in the national survey which is quite similar to the third statement in Table 2A is, "should be radio/TV broadcasting of court proceedings of interest to general public." A total of fifty-six percent of the respondents strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with this statement. In the Iowa survey, on the other hand, only forty percent either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement as presented.

Finally, the statement in the national survey corresponding to the fourth statement in Table 2A is, "photographers should be permitted to take still pictures at court trials." Thirty-four percent of the respondents in the national survey either strongly agreed or somewhat agreed with this statement. In Iowa, thirty-eight percent of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed to the statement as presented in the survey.

The final table to be included in this subsection of the report presents information regarding respondents' most important source of information about the court system in Iowa. The question was posed to respondents as follows:

**From what source have you learned the most about Iowa courts: Please choose one of the following. (If more than one source is given, enter the most important source.)**

A total of seven sources were read to respondents as well as the option of specifying some other source if applicable. The responses to this question are reported in Table 3.

The most important source mentioned by the greatest percentage of respondents is newspapers, with 39%. Approximately 19% of the respondents indicated that school or formal instruction is the most important source of information about the court system. An additional 18% indicated that television was their most important source of information. If we combine the percentages for these three sources of information, we find that they are listed as most important by approximately 75% of all respondents.

If we focus exclusively on sources of information associated with the media, we find that approximately 57% of all respondents indicate that newspapers or television is their most important source of information about the courts. Returning to Table 2A for a minute, we remind the reader that 86% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "television and newspapers should play an important role in informing the public about the court." Without a doubt, the media has been and will continue to be very important in the process of educating the public regarding the court system.

A similar question was also asked of respondents participating in the national public opinion survey conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly and White, Inc. In this national survey, respondents were asked the following: "Using this list of sources,

TABLE 3

SOURCE FROM WHICH RESPONDENTS  
LEARNED THE MOST ABOUT IOWA COURTS

<u>Source</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents indicating this source was most important</u>
School, formal instruction	18.6% (93)
Newspapers	39.1% (196)
Television	17.6% (88)
Pamphlets and brochures	1.0% (5)
In court as a participant	8.8% (44)
In court as a visitor or observer	3.2% (16)
Contact with a lawyer or judge	7.0% (35)
Other	2.6% (13)
Don't know	2.0% (10)

where did you learn the most about the state and local courts. . .?" Approximately 24% indicated school or formal education was the source from which the most was learned, compared with 19% in Iowa. Approximately 17% of the national survey respondents indicated newspapers, magazines or books was the source from which the most was learned, compared with 39% indicating newspapers as the most important source in Iowa. Finally, approximately 20% of the respondents in the national survey indicated TV news programs and entertainment programs were the source from which the most was learned, compared with 18% of the respondents in Iowa indicating that television was the most important source of information. Other sources listed in the national survey account for only 18% of the respondents, with no source accounting for more than 8% alone.

#### **Respondents' Ratings of Organizations and Agencies in Iowa**

In this subsection of the survey results section of the report, we shall present respondents' ratings of seven key institutions or organizations in Iowa. These include the county board of supervisors, the local police, the Iowa Highway Patrol, the state court, the state prisons, the legislature, and the county attorney. Following the presentation of this information, we shall indicate how respondents view the need for court reform.

The ratings presented in Table 4 reflect the responses of participants in the survey to the following:

**How would you rate the job the following groups  
are doing using the categories poor, fair, good,  
and excellent.**

Respondents were then given a list of seven groups as described above.

The group or agency receiving the highest rating, as revealed in Table 4 is the Iowa Highway Patrol. Approximately 81% of all respondents rated the performance of the Iowa Highway Patrol as either good or excellent. The group receiving the

TABLE 4

RESPONDENTS' RATINGS OF THE JOBS STATE AND LOCAL  
ORGANIZATIONS AND AGENCIES ARE DOING

<u>Group</u>	Rating				
	<u>Poor</u>	<u>Fair</u>	<u>Good</u>	<u>Excellent</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
County Board of Supervisors	6.0% (30)	40.5% (203)	41.5% (208)	2.4% (12)	9.6% (48)
Local Police	8.4% (42)	30.3% (152)	51.5% (258)	7.6% (38)	2.2% (11)
Iowa Highway Patrol	1.8% (9)	14.4% (72)	66.7% (334)	14.2% (71)	3.0% (15)
State Courts	4.6% (23)	30.5% (153)	42.7% (214)	1.4% (7)	20.8% (104)
State Prisons	23.0% (115)	36.3% (182)	14.2% (71)	0.8% (4)	25.7% (129)
Legislature	8.4% (42)	41.1% (206)	38.3% (192)	1.8% (9)	10.4% (52)
County Attorney	6.6% (33)	27.7% (139)	48.3% (242)	4.6% (23)	12.8% (64)

lowest rating by respondents is the state prisons. Only 15% of the respondents rated the performance of the state prisons as either good or excellent, with 23% of the respondents indicating the performance of the state prisons is poor.

Approximately 44% of the respondents rated the state courts' performance as either good or excellent. We should note, however, that approximately 21% of the respondents indicated they didn't know when asked to rate the courts. The only other group in the list with such a high percentage of respondents indicating they didn't know is the state prisons. Approximately 26% of the respondents indicated they didn't know when asked to rate the performance of Iowa's prisons. On the other hand, 3% of respondents indicated they didn't know when asked to rate the performance of the Highway Patrol. These findings no doubt reflect in part the difference in visibility and contact which citizens experience with these seven organizations.

Ranking these seven groups by mean response and percentage of respondents rating the performance as good or excellent, both in descending order, produces the following listing:

<u>Group</u>	<u>Mean Rating*</u>	<u>% Rating Group Good or Excellent</u>
Iowa Highway Patrol	2.96	80.9%
Local Police	2.60	58.7%
County Attorney	2.58	52.9%
State Courts	2.52	44.1%
County Board of Supervisors	2.45	43.5%
Legislature	2.37	40.1%
State Prisons	1.90	15.0%

\*Standard deviations are available on request.

In the national public opinion survey conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly and White, Inc., respondents were asked to indicate their degree of confidence in major American institutions. Although the nature of the rating is not the same as that

used in the Iowa survey, we shall report the results of the national survey here for those institutions included in both surveys with the reminder to the reader that the results are not directly comparable.

Four of the groups included in the Iowa survey were also included in the national survey. These include local police, state and local courts, state legislature, and state prison system. In the national survey, respondents were given the choice of five degrees of confidence: extremely confident, very confident, somewhat confident, slightly confident, and not at all confident. In reporting the national findings, we shall group the first two and the last two categories.

Regarding the local police, 40% of the respondents in the national survey indicated they were extremely or very confident; 31% indicated they were somewhat confident and 28% indicated they were slightly or not at all confident. Regarding the state legislature in their state, 21% of the respondents in the national survey indicated they were extremely confident or very confident while 43% indicated they were somewhat confident and 33% indicated they were slightly confident or not at all confident. Seventeen percent of the respondents in the national survey indicated they were extremely confident or very confident in their state prison system; 30% indicated they were somewhat confident in the prison system and 49% indicated they were slightly or not at all confident in the prison system. Finally, 23% of the respondents in the national survey indicated they were extremely confident or very confident in the state and local courts; 38% of the respondents indicated they were somewhat confident in the courts while 37% indicated they were slightly confident or not at all confident.

As we have already indicated, the national survey not only utilized a five point rating scale versus four in the Iowa survey but also asked respondents to indicate their degree of confidence in institutions rather than to rate their performance, as was asked in the Iowa survey. For these reasons the ratings are not comparable.

Despite the value in making comparisons and our desire to offer comparisons when applicable, we shall simply provide this particular information as two distinct measures of similar institutions and allow the reader to assess the implied differences and similarities in the two surveys.

Returning to the Iowa survey, we shall now present respondents' opinions regarding the need for court reform in Iowa. We shall present first the findings regarding the need for reform. We shall then offer in broad categories reasons offered by respondents for their position regarding reform and their suggestions for improvements. As was the case regarding attitude change reported earlier in the report, we shall group responses to these open-ended questions into relatively broad categories here with the understanding that a more detailed analysis of these comments is planned and that the specific comments are available to anyone who would like to read them.

Respondents' were asked to respond to the following statement regarding court reform:

**Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the statement, "Iowa courts need to be reformed."**

Approximately 60% (298) of the respondents agreed with this statement. Approximately 20% (99) disagreed with this statement, with approximately 20% (101) indicating that they didn't know.

As a follow-up question, respondents were asked:

**Why do you feel this way?**

Approximately 67% of the respondents offered comments in response to this question. The comments that are offered in agreement with the statement can be grouped into six broad categories for our purposes here. Approximately 25% of the respondents offering comments in agreement with the statement that Iowa courts need to be reformed expressed overall system concerns; most respondents in this

group indicated some concern with existing laws and regulations. Another concern mentioned equally as frequently by those agreeing with the statement regarding reform involves the supposed leniency of the courts (as opposed to laws that should be tougher on criminals); approximately 25% of the comments are in this category. A third concern, which was expressed in approximately 21% of the comments in agreement with the statement, involves court delay. Approximately 14% of those offering comments in agreement with the statement indicated a concern regarding equal justice; here, reference was made typically to those with more money receiving "more" justice. Approximately 4% indicated a concern with personnel as their reason for agreeing with the statement; in these comments, particular reference was made to judges or attorneys. Finally, approximately 12% of the respondents who offered comments in agreement with the statement indicated they didn't know any specific factors that caused them to agree.

Respondents who offered comments which were in disagreement with the statement that the courts needed to be reformed typically indicated that they felt the system is okay and working well. Approximately 83% of those comments expressing disagreement with the statement can be grouped in this category. Other reasons offered for disagreeing with the statement include: the suggestion that more judges are needed, not a change in the system (5%); the suggestion that laws should be changed, not the court system (5%); the suggestion that money should not be spent on such reform (3%); the suggestion that each change makes the system worse (3%); and the suggestion that only certain parts of the system should be changed (1%). A total of seventy-eight comments were classified as being in disagreement with the statement in question; two hundred and sixty comments were classified as being in agreement with the statement.

Respondents were also given the opportunity to indicate what they feel should be done to improve the courts. Respondents were asked to comment in response to

the question:

**What can be done to improve the courts in Iowa?**

Approximately 45% of all respondents offered specific comments in response to this question. Once again, we have grouped these comments into relatively broad categories for purposes of reporting them here. The improvement mentioned most frequently by respondents involves reducing delay in court proceedings. Approximately 20% of respondents who offered comments mentioned this as a specific improvement.

Approximately 17% of those offering comments suggested a change in laws or regulations as a desired improvement. An additional 13% of the respondents offering comments suggested the courts should be less lenient in sentencing. We should note here that only respondents' comments which specifically referred to leniency by judges or the courts were placed in the latter category. Many respondents who suggested a change in laws were suggesting that stricter penalties be legislatively enacted.

Other suggested improvements offered by respondents in their comments include hiring/appointing better or improving existing personnel (12%), hiring more judges (10%), and increasing the public's involvement in the court system (6%). Additional suggestions represent no more than 2% of all comments individually; in total, such comments account for the remaining 22%.

The national public opinion survey conducted by Yankelovich, Skelly and White, Inc. also included a question regarding perceived need for court reform. Respondents were asked: "Using the scale on this card, please tell me how much you think the state and local court system in (your state) needs to be reformed, if at all?" Possible responses included the following: in great need of reform; in moderate need of reform; in some need of reform; in slight need of reform; in no need of reform; uncertain.

Respondents in the national survey are divided into two categories for the purpose of reporting results: those with any state court experience and those with no state court experience. Among respondents with any state court experience, a total of 56% indicated they felt state courts were either in great need or in moderate need of reform. Among respondents with no state court experience, a total of 41% indicated they felt state courts were either in great need or in moderate need of reform. For those respondents with any state court experience, 27% indicated state courts were in some need of reform, 7% indicated state courts were in slight need of reform, and 2% indicated state courts were in no need of reform. Among respondents with no state court experience, 40% indicated state courts were in some need of reform, 8% indicated state courts were in slight need of reform, and 3% indicated state courts were in no need of reform.

Although the breakdown by any experience/no experience in court used in the national survey is not available yet for the Iowa data, we can conclude from the data available for both surveys that the perceived need for court reform is not as great in Iowa as it is nationally. Approximately 20% of the respondents in the Iowa survey disagreed with the statement that Iowa courts need to be reformed; an additional 20% indicated they didn't know. In the national survey, only 2% of those with any court experience and 3% of those with no court experience indicated there was no need of reform; the percentage of respondents who were uncertain about the need for court reform was 8% for those with both any experience and no experience. Nevertheless, we caution the reader here as we have in the past to read the respective questions and available responses carefully in the national and Iowa surveys when attempting to make comparisons.

### **Respondents' Background Information**

This is the last of four subsections in which the Iowa public opinion survey

results are presented. Here, we shall report the respondents' residence city size, the sex of respondents, the race of respondents, the age of respondents, the education of respondents, the legal training of respondents, the income of respondents, the occupation of respondents, and the number of years respondents have lived in Iowa. County of residence is also available but will not be reported here. For each of the above, the question and possible responses (where applicable) will be presented with the percentage distributions. Very little comment should be necessary in this subsection of the report.

First, respondents were asked:

**What city do you live in?**

Once the city was recorded, coders of the survey circled the appropriate category indicating the size of the city. The distribution of respondents by city size is reported here.

<u>City Size</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents Living in this Size City</u>	
Rural	6.4%	( 32)
Under 1,000	13.4%	( 67)
1,001-5,000	21.6%	(108)
5,001-10,000	13.6%	( 68)
10,001-25,000	5.4%	( 27)
25,001-50,000	11.0%	( 55)
50,001 and above	28.3%	(142)
Don't Know	0.2%	( 1)

Respondents were asked next to indicate their sex. They were asked:

**Are you male or female?**

The distribution by sex of respondents is reported below.

<u>Sex of Respondent</u>	
Male	Female
48.1%	51.7%
(241)	(259)
missing 21	

Respondents were also asked to indicate their race. They were asked:

**Do you consider yourself to be black, white, or some other race?**

The distribution by race of respondents is:

black	white	other	don't know
0.4%	98.0%	1.4%	0.2%
( 2)	(488)	( 7)	( 1)

Next, respondents were asked to indicate their age. The question asked is:

**What is your age?**

Responses are divided into six age categories, plus a no answer category. The percentage distribution by age of respondents is:

<u>Age (years)</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents in this Category</u>
18-23	13.2% ( 66)
24-29	16.6% ( 83)
30-39	23.8% (119)
40-49	9.8% ( 49)
50-59	14.4% ( 72)
60 and over	21.2% (106)
no answer	1.0% ( 5)

Respondents were also asked to indicate the highest grade of school they had completed. The question is?

**What is the highest grade of school you have completed?**

Responses to this question are divided into six categories, plus a don't know and a no answer categories. The percentage distribution by highest grade of school completed of respondents is:

<u>Grade of School</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents Indicating This is the Highest Grade completed</u>
Grade School (K-8)	6.8% ( 34)
Some High School (9-11)	3.6% ( 13)
High School Graduate (12 or GED)	44.6% (223)
Some College or Associate Degree (13-15)	20.4% (102)
College Graduate (16)	14.0% ( 70)
Post Graduate (17+)	5.6% ( 28)
Don't Know	0
No Answer	0

The next background information question asked of respondents is:

**Have you had any legal training?**

The response to this question was:

<u>Yes</u>	<u>No</u>	<u>Don't Know</u>
7.4%	92.4%	0.2%
(37)	(464)	(1)

For those respondents answering yes to the above question, they were asked the following as a follow-up question:

**(If yes) What kind of legal training have you had?**

The respondents indicated the following in response to this question.

<u>Type of Legal Training</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents Who Have Had This Training</u>	
Paralegal Studies, legal secretary, court reporter	3.0%	(15)
Attended Law School	1.4%	( 7)
Law School Graduate	0.2%	( 1)
Other (Specify)	4.0%	(20)
No Legal Training	91.4%	(458)

Next, respondents were asked about their family income. The question as asked in the survey is:

**In which income range does your total family  
income before taxes fall?**

Four income ranges were read to the respondents, with the categories "don't know" and "no answer" also available. The percentage distribution by income range of respondents is as follows:

<u>Income Range (dollars)</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents Indicating this Range as as their family income</u>	
Less than \$10,000	19.0%	( 93)
\$10,000-\$19,999	31.9%	(156)
\$20,000-\$29,999	24.3%	(119)
More than \$30,000	15.3%	( 75)
Don't Know	2.9%	( 14)
No Answer	6.5%	( 32)

Respondents were also asked to list their occupation. Coders of the survey subsequently assigned this response to one of thirteen categories. The question asked is:

**What is your occupation?**

Responses were categorized as follows:

<u>Occupation Category</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents Whose Occupation Fits This Category</u>
Professional	14.5% (72)
Managerial	4.6% (23)
Clerical	7.2% (36)
Sales	5.4% (27)
Skilled	13.9% (69)
Unskilled	5.2% (26)
Domestic Service	0.2% ( 1)
Farmer	7.0% (35)
Homemaker	16.9% (84)
Service Worker	3.6% (18)
Student	5.4% (27)
Retired	13.1% (65)
Unemployed	2.0% (10)
Other (Specify)	0.8% ( 4)

The final background information question asked of respondents was:

**How many years have you lived in Iowa?**

Respondents answered as follows:

<u>Number of Years in Iowa</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents Indicating This</u>
Less than one	1.0% ( 5)
1-2	2.2% ( 11)
3-4	2.4% ( 12)
5-7	3.2% ( 16)
8-10	3.2% ( 16)
More than 10	88.0% (439)

Finally, we should also note that respondents were asked if they "have any suggestions for improving this survey." A total of 53 respondents offered comments regarding the survey. These comments, as is true of all material associated with the survey, are available for review.

#### SECTION IV: CONCLUDING REMARKS

We shall not attempt to summarize all of the findings presented in this report. We have made every effort to facilitate the reader's comprehension of both the questions asked in the survey and the respondents' answers. The Table of Contents, List of Tables, and List of Survey Questions with page references in the text should provide the reader with immediate access to any information desired. As we have indicated throughout the report, the Iowa Judicial Coordinating Committee will make available for review at the State Capitol all public opinion survey material.

The citizens of Iowa do not have a thorough and accurate understanding of the court system in their state. At the same time, the level of understanding overall is no worse than would be expected based on surveys completed previously in this country. Respondents' suggestions regarding court reform were anticipated and in many cases are appropriate suggestions.

We are now committed to use the information reported here in addition to more detailed analysis of these findings presently under way to assess the lack of understanding of the court system by the general public and to design and implement programs and projects which will improve significantly both the public's understanding of and the public's involvement with the Iowa court system. The Iowa court has already initiated this effort and can be expected to continue striving for significant improvement in this particular problem area.



# Judicial Coordinating Committee

IOWA SUPREME COURT

ROBERT A. LOWE PH.D  
DIRECTOR OF COURT PLANNING



STATE HOUSE  
DES MOINES, IOWA 50319  
(515) 281-6870

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